E-PROCEEDINGS
(EXTENDED ABSTRACT)

4th International Conference on Islam, Media and Communication

ICIMaC
2024

"Communication & Digitisation in Madani Society"

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OF

4th International Conference on Islam, Media and Communication

(ICIMaC 2024)

"Communication & Digitisation in Madani Society"

5th March, 2024

FACULTY OF LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT, UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA (USIM)

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MOTIVATIONAL DRIVERS FOR WRITING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ISLAMIC STUDIES

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Abstract: Motivation to write and share religious experiences is essential, especially in Islamic da'wah where preachers excel in verbal communication but write less. Both verbal and written proficiency are crucial for da'wah, making it important for students in Islamic studies to be motivated to write and share religious experiences and knowledge. Yet, there is limited understanding of their motivation for such writing purposes. Therefore, the objective of this study is to describe the students' perceptions on the factors that motivate them to write. Using a qualitative approach, the study conducted interviews with students enrolled in Islamic studies in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The results indicated that feedback significantly influenced students to enhance their writing skills, and various factors, including the choice of topics or genres, technology assistance, and support from lecturers, played essential roles in motivating them to write. Additional drivers, such as increased reading, positive mindset, writing opportunities, good intentions, and family support, were also identified. Based on these findings, the study recommends further investigation into the impact of a supportive writing environment on the writing motivation of university students in Islamic studies, particularly at UNIMAS, to enhance the effectiveness of such an environment.

Keywords: Motivational Drivers, Writing, University Students, Islamic Studies

INTRODUCTION

Writing serves as the fundamental basis for evaluating one's learning and intellectual capabilities. It empowers individuals with communication and critical thinking skills, facilitating the clear expression and refinement of ideas for personal and collective understanding. Additionally, writing constitutes a vital professional skill that enhances overall communication and reading proficiency, contributing to a more enriched life. As a result, numerous Malaysians encounter challenges in effectively conveying their thoughts in writing, potentially hindering their academic and professional success (Wan Ibrahim & Othman, 2021; Moses & Mohamad, 2019). In summary, writing plays a pivotal role in personal development, positively impacting everyone's life.

A significant domain where the motivation to write and share written content is crucial pertains to the expression of religious experiences and beliefs, an area lacking sufficient research. In the context of Islamic da'wah, speakers excel in verbal communication, particularly in oratory skills, but written communication is comparatively underutilised. In the realm of Islamic da'wah, proficiency in both spoken and written communication is essential for preachers (Mohd Noor, Suyurno & Mohd Sairi, 2022). Students studying Islamic studies and related fields should be motivated to write and share their religious experiences and knowledge. However, there is limited

understanding of their motivation levels for engaging in writing for these purposes.

Therefore, exploring students' perceptions of the factors that motivate them to write is essential for creating effective and engaging learning experiences, promoting intrinsic motivation, and addressing challenges to ultimately enhance students' overall writing skills and lifelong learning habits.

METHODS

The objective of this study is to describe the students' perceptions on the factors that motivate them to write. Employing a qualitative approach, the research conducted interviews with 11 participants (6 females and 5 males) enrolled in Islamic studies at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

The selection of students in UNIMAS pursuing Islamic studies as the study's sample is based on their pivotal role as future Islamic preachers. These students are tasked with engaging and attracting the younger generation through innovative and modern means of preaching to foster a closer understanding of Islam (Arifin, 2018).

This study employed the thematic analysis method to scrutinise the data gathered from interviews. Thematic analysis shares analytical procedures with content analysis, encompassing the creation of initial codes, identification of themes, review, and refinement of themes, culminating in the definition and naming of identified themes. Following the stages outlined by Vaismoradi et al. (2013) and Braun and Clarke (2012), the final step in thematic analysis involves presenting the findings derived from the preceding stages. In this study, these procedures were adapted to offer guidance to the coder during the data analysis phase.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the interviews unveiled various motivators that prompted students in Islamic studies at UNIMAS to engage in writing. These factors encompassed feedback and praise, the selection of topics or genres, assistance from technology, guidance from lecturers, and additional elements like heightened reading, a positive mindset, writing opportunities, good intentions, and familial support.

1. Feedback and praise

Each of the 11 participants affirmed that receiving feedback and praise served as a motivating factor for them to increase their writing efforts and enhance their writing skills. Here is an excerpt:

> "Receiving praise for my writing would undoubtedly bring me immense joy, fuelling a desire to continue creating. On the other hand, if I encounter constructive criticism, it stirs enthusiasm within me, prompting a diligent search for areas to enhance and steer my writing towards improvement." (Participant 1)

This discovery mirrors the results found in Eckstein et al.'s (2023) investigation into how L2 writers perceive and value praise. In their study, participants exhibited a preference for performance-based praise over praise centred on the individual. These findings provide educators with valuable insights, particularly regarding the formulation of praise statements in response to student writing.

2. The selection of topics or genres

The feedback from all 11 participants indicated that the selection of topics or genres played a role in inspiring students to engage in writing. Here is an excerpt:

> "In light of the present circumstances, the focal point is the Palestinian-Israeli issue, a topic of significant concern. Personally, I am deeply drawn to addressing the imperative of peace, emphasising its vital need to be acknowledged and cultivated. By documenting this issue, I aim to contribute to a broader awareness, underscoring the

paramount importance of peace on a global scale." (Participant 2)

This discovery aligns with the findings of Driscoll et al.'s (2020) study, which delved into the role of genre in comprehending and fostering writing proficiency. While their research indicated that both basic and sophisticated genre knowledge contribute to writing development, their findings imply that a deeper understanding of genre correlates more strongly with writing proficiency.

3. Technology assistance

The input from all 11 participants highlighted that technology or digital tools played a facilitative role in their writing process, primarily due to the convenience they offered. These tools aided in effortlessly sharing ideas and disseminating information through social media platforms. Additionally, they served as valuable sources of information and allowed participants to stay connected with their favourite writers. Here is an excerpt:

> "When it comes to digital technologies or tools, my primary avenue for disseminating my writing is through them. The prevalent use of social media platforms, particularly *Facebook*, is a key factor in my approach. Consequently, I frequently share and communicate the content I write through posts and messages on *Facebook*." (Participant 5)

This discovery resonates with the results of Wen and Walters' (2022) investigation, which aimed to assess the influence of technology on the writing abilities of elementary students. The outcomes of their meta-analysis reaffirmed that technology exerts a moderate impact on the quality of writing and a significant impact on the quantity of writing among elementary school students. Additionally, the authors identified the type of technology integration and writing genres as two critical variables that influence the causal relationship between technology and writing performance for elementary students.

4. Guidance from lecturers

Each of the 11 participants expressed gratitude for the guidance provided by their lecturers. They viewed lecturers as qualified experts, motivators, and mentors. The feedback from lecturers, comprising encouragement, comments, and suggestions, was highlighted as a crucial factor that actively motivates them to engage in writing. Here is an excerpt:

> "I have a lecturer who serves as my mentor. The manner in which he establishes contact is through casual greetings, frequent conversations, and offering insights and ideas. Simultaneously, he provides unwavering support for my endeavours. In instances where my actions may conflict with certain principles, he delivers constructive reprimands without causing undue distress. (Participant 4)

5. Other factors

a. Increased reading

The majority of participants encountered the challenge of a lack of ideas in their writing. Consequently, they engaged in extensive reading and sought additional sources of information to overcome this obstacle. In addition to reading, they also turned to short stories as a means of garnering inspiration:

> "The familiar hurdle I encountered during my writing process was, as usual, the notorious Writer's Block. Struggling to advance my writing, I adopted a strategy of seeking inspiration by delving into books, perusing the works of other writers, and watching short stories to spark ideas. Additionally, I revisited my initial writing plans, amplifying my motivation to overcome the block and resume my writing flow." (Participant 10)

This finding mirrors the results uncovered in Atayeva et al.'s (2019) investigation, which explored the impact of students' reading skills on their academic writing abilities. Their

findings indicated that a consistent reading habit had a significant influence on the academic writing proficiency of college students.

b. Positive mindset

A significant number of participants encountered the challenge of facing criticism or condemnation for their writing. Despite this, it did not discourage them from continuing to write. Instead, they viewed the feedback as valuable lessons, accepting the comments as constructive insights to fuel their ongoing improvement:

> "In the current landscape, people or netizens tend to be more critical of others' writing. However, this has not deterred my enthusiasm. As Saidina Ali wisely advised, "Pay attention to what was said, don't pay attention to who said it."." (Participant 7)

This discovery resonates with the findings unveiled in Zhu, Yao, and Lu's (2024) research, which investigated the interplay between a growth mindset, students' feedback literacy in writing, and their engagement with feedback. The study highlighted a positive correlation between possessing a growth mindset and exhibiting all five aspects of student writing feedback literacy: valuing feedback, recognising various feedback sources, making assessments, handling emotions, and taking appropriate actions.

c. Writing opportunities

One participant encountered the challenge of not receiving a positive response. In response, this participant sought advice and guidance from experts in the field of writing:

> "Certainly, I have encountered challenges in my writing journey. One such obstacle is the lack of response from those around me regarding my written work. In such instances, I actively seek inspiration and guidance from more experienced individuals, asking for insights on areas I can improve to sustain and enhance my writing efforts." (Participant 1)

d. Good intentions

A participant held the belief that, in all our endeavours, incorporating a good intention is crucial, as it serves as motivation for successful completion:

> "Every endeavour we undertake comes with its set of challenges. Regardless of the nature of these challenges, our key is to maintain a focus on the right intentions. With proper intent, our determination remains unwavering, allowing us to persist until we achieve completion." (Participant 2)

e. Familial support

In addition to the motivational role of lecturers in encouraging students to write, family members, especially parents, also play a crucial part in supporting their children's writing endeavours:

> "I encounter various challenges in my writing journey, particularly grappling with issues such as a shortage of creative ideas and a lack of familial support." (Participant 11)

CONCLUSIONS

The interviews conducted with students in Islamic studies at UNIMAS unveiled a rich tapestry of motivators that propel them to engage in writing. The multifaceted nature of these motivators includes the impact of feedback and praise, the significance of selecting compelling topics or genres, the facilitative role of technology, the guiding influence of lecturers, and supplementary factors like increased reading, maintaining a positive mindset, seeking writing opportunities, fostering good intentions, and the support of family members.

These findings collectively underscore the dynamic interplay of various motivators that contribute to the engagement of Islamic studies students in writing activities. The diversity of these influences emphasises the nuanced and multifaceted nature of the writing process, highlighting the importance of a supportive

ecosystem encompassing feedback, guidance, technology, and personal resilience. Based on these findings, the study recommends further investigation into the impact of a supportive writing environment on the writing motivation of university students in Islamic studies, particularly at UNIMAS, to enhance the effectiveness of such an environment.

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